

Thursday, March 17th, 2005
Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

SO WHO'S THE CONSERVATIVE, AND WHO'S THE LIBERAL?

I don't know about you, but I'm really confused. The whole political system seems upside down. It used to be pretty easy to tell the difference between the Conservatives and Liberals. I always thought the Liberals cheered for the expansion of federal power, and the conservatives, particularly Louisiana, fought for the idea that our democratic system works best when most of the power resides with state and local governments. But that was before conservatives took charge. Now these former stalwart states-righters find they don't mind the federal government running things.

I'm sure the Louisiana Republican Party is in crisis mode. Roger Villere, Dan Kyle, & Co. have to be pulling out what hair they have left. My old friend Moon Griffon, who is about as good as they come in stirring up right wing venom on his daily Louisiana talk show, has to be on a frustrating rant. So must be Jeff Crouere, Chris Tidmore, Ed Buggs and all the other radio talk gang. I can just hear all of them bemoaning: "How could these Washington conservatives betray us? Haven't any of these yo-yos read the Constitution and the 10th amendment?"

Now, if you're not too familiar with this amendment, don't feel too bad. Neither is the U.S. Supreme Court or a number of our legislators in Washington. Here's what the amendment says: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people." But little attention seems to be being paid to these words.

As far back as I can remember, conservatives have argued for local control of our schools. But just a few weeks ago, the National Conference of State Legislatures issued a report highly critical of the federal "No Child Left Behind" Act, calling it the biggest federal intrusion into education in American history. They make a good point. There's not a word about education in the Constitution.

When it comes to marriage, conservatives now want the federal government to seize control from the states to ban gay marriage everywhere. Don't waste your time, Louisiana Legislature. It's none of your business anymore. In California, a law was passed permitting seriously ill people to get prescriptions under the direction of a doctor for medical marijuana. But the Justice Department wants the law thrown out. Forget it, California. It's not your decision anymore. The Congress, including representatives from Louisiana, will tell you what you can or cannot do.

The state of Washington put into law a Death With Dignity Act, which authorizes doctors to give lethal drugs to the terminally ill. The bureaucracy in Washington, D.C. is trying to do away with the Washington law. Citizens in the state of

Washington no longer have a say. It's now a federal issue. Maybe you agree with the law or maybe you don't. But should all these shots be called in the nation's capital? Do you want a faraway bureaucrat, sticking his nose in every state, and local decision?

So come on Moon, Roger and Company. Mount the troops. Raise the rallying cry. I'm sure those of you who have a voice and a strong following will want to tell the Washington establishment to leave the states alone to run their business as each state sees fit, unless there is some paramount national issue involved. Or do we just continue to ignore the Constitution?

(To voice your opinion of federal meddling in states rights, take the new poll now up on my website. Go to <http://www.jimbrownla.com>.)

NATIONAL GUARD RELIEF FUND

Louisiana has lost more national guardsmen in Iraq proportionally than any other state. Last month, I wrote about the pittance that is given to the family of a soldier lost in combat. Unfortunately, Congress has failed to set a safety net for military families that lose heads of households. There are several things the Legislature should do in Louisiana during this upcoming April session.

First of all, every Louisiana national guardsman should be given a \$250,000 life-insurance policy paid for by the state. Secondly, a law should be passed allowing a check-off box for military family relief on any state tax return. The check-off would allow Louisiana taxpayers to give all or part of their refund to be distributed in grants to families of soldiers serving in Iraq who are facing the domestic hazards of wartime.

In addition, the Legislature should consider tax breaks for those families and even tuition assistance to children of these soldiers. Look, this should in no way be considered a charity donation. This should be looked on as a token of gratitude to those men and women of Louisiana who are making a huge personal sacrifice

Members of Congress were falling all over themselves last week, rushing out press releases about all the highway funds their respective districts were to receive in the federal transportation bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives. A new road here, an overlay of there. It reads real good. But when you take a look at the details, Louisiana gets shortchanged one more time.

From the very beginning of the Federal Highway trust fund, Louisiana has been a donor state. We have always put far more in then was sent back from Washington.

Year in and year out, Louisiana has received little more than 90 cents for every dollar sent to Washington. The federal tax on gasoline is put into this fund to pay for highways throughout the country. But the Louisiana highway system has never received the priorities found in many other states. Forget the fact that I-10 crossing the southern part of the state is the busiest major transportation route in the country. And that numerous narrow roads, many without even shoulders, deliver the energy and seafood Louisiana supplies to the rest of the nation.

While Louisiana continues to be shortchanged, federal money out of this fund goes to pay for bicycle trails in Northern California, and numerous other nonessential projects in many other states. And look in New York, a state that gets much more back than it puts an. How about their \$6.2 million to pay homeless people to remove graffiti on city bridges? The list goes on and on.

The President has said that the legislation contains so much pork, he may well veto it. Maybe this is a good idea. Then perhaps Congress can go back to the drawing board, and come up with a formula that's fairer to states like Louisiana, and one that makes much more sense.

Once they go to Washington, they never come back home. Former Democratic Minority Leader Tom Daschle is the latest expatriate who has chosen to stay in Washington. After his defeat in last year's election, Daschle will join former Sen. Bob Dole to lobby his former colleagues. He joins almost every former Louisiana congressman and senator who, once retired, doesn't come back. The home state gets little benefit from the years of experience and contacts by these former legislators.

To run for these jobs, there are age and residency requirements. Maybe the legislature should add a "come back home for at least two years" requirement. In other words, to run in the first place, you would have to agree to come back home for a certain length of time to bring the knowledge you have learned back to your district. We complain about the outward migration of our young people. What about those who are sent off to serve the state, but never return?

Think what the Governor could do with a task force of former senators and congressman, who collectively have made important national and international contacts? Talk about economic development opportunities. As candidates, these folks are smothering us with attention to support their candidacy. Let's make a deal with them up front and from the start. We will support you in your quest to serve us in the nation's capital. But when you are done, we expect a "little more" service back home. It's a choice, and all apart of the job. Or, at least, it should be.

ALUMNI FROM LOUISIANA
RUN INSURANCE DEPARTMENTS

Despite past controversy, the Louisiana Insurance Department has several former employees who now run other departments around the country. The most recent is Eleanor Kitzman, the new top regulator in South Carolina. My office brought her to Louisiana from Texas back in the mid 1990's to work in the receivership area, helping to straighten out troubled companies.

Al Iuppa also worked with me in the early 90's in the receivership department. He is now Commissioner in Maine. The present Texas Commissioner, Jose' Montemayor, was part of the initial team I took to England in the mid 90's to conduct the first ever major audit of Lloyd's of London. He went on to become the top insurance regulator in Texas. A number of employees in other insurance departments were initially trained by Louisiana. And of course the present Louisiana commissioner was my appointee.

It's good to know that Louisiana continues to have a significant say in the insurance rules of the road that affects us all. Good luck in your new job, Eleanor.

"The United States is a nation of laws: badly written and randomly enforced."
--Frank Zappa

"Why does Sea World have a seafood restaurant?? I'm halfway through my fish burger and I realize, Oh my God.... I could be eating a slow learner."

--Lynda Montgomery

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown

(We welcome a new newspaper who will carry Jim Brown's column each week, The Toledo Bend Tribune. Glad to have you as part of our syndication.)